STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Are Homeless People Beautiful?

by Osha Neumann

This very odd question occurred to me after Terry Messman, the editor of *Street Spirit*, suggested I write something for the paper in conjunction with the publication of my book, *Doodling on the Titanic: the Making of Art in a World on the Brink*.

My day job as a lawyer defending people who are homeless doesn't give me much chance to think about beauty. I'm all about how to squeeze my clients through the loopholes of law and convince a judge that even though they sleep without a roof over their head, they're still covered by the Constitution.

Beauty doesn't enter into it.

But here I am, sitting in court, waiting for the judge to take the bench and this question—Are Homeless People Beautiful? — is roiling around in my mind.

I don't argue in court about whether homeless people are beautiful. It's not something on which a judge will render a verdict. Nevertheless, aesthetic judgments about people who are homeless are always there in the mix, disappearing into a crowd of judgments about their cleanliness, their criminality, and the risk they may or may not represent to society's health, well-being and economic prosperity.

These judgments are there in the court in which I am now sitting. They are there in the court of public opinion.

And usually they are negative.

Are Homeless People Beautiful? The answer generally is no. They are not.

This should not be surprising. People who are homeless are the targets of prejudice. And the target *de jour* of prejudice is invariably stigmatized as bad and ugly, morally and aesthetically displeasing.

"Dirty Jew," the anti-Semite shouts, "with your ugly hooked nose."

Many Jews in Israel have much the same opinion about Palestinians.

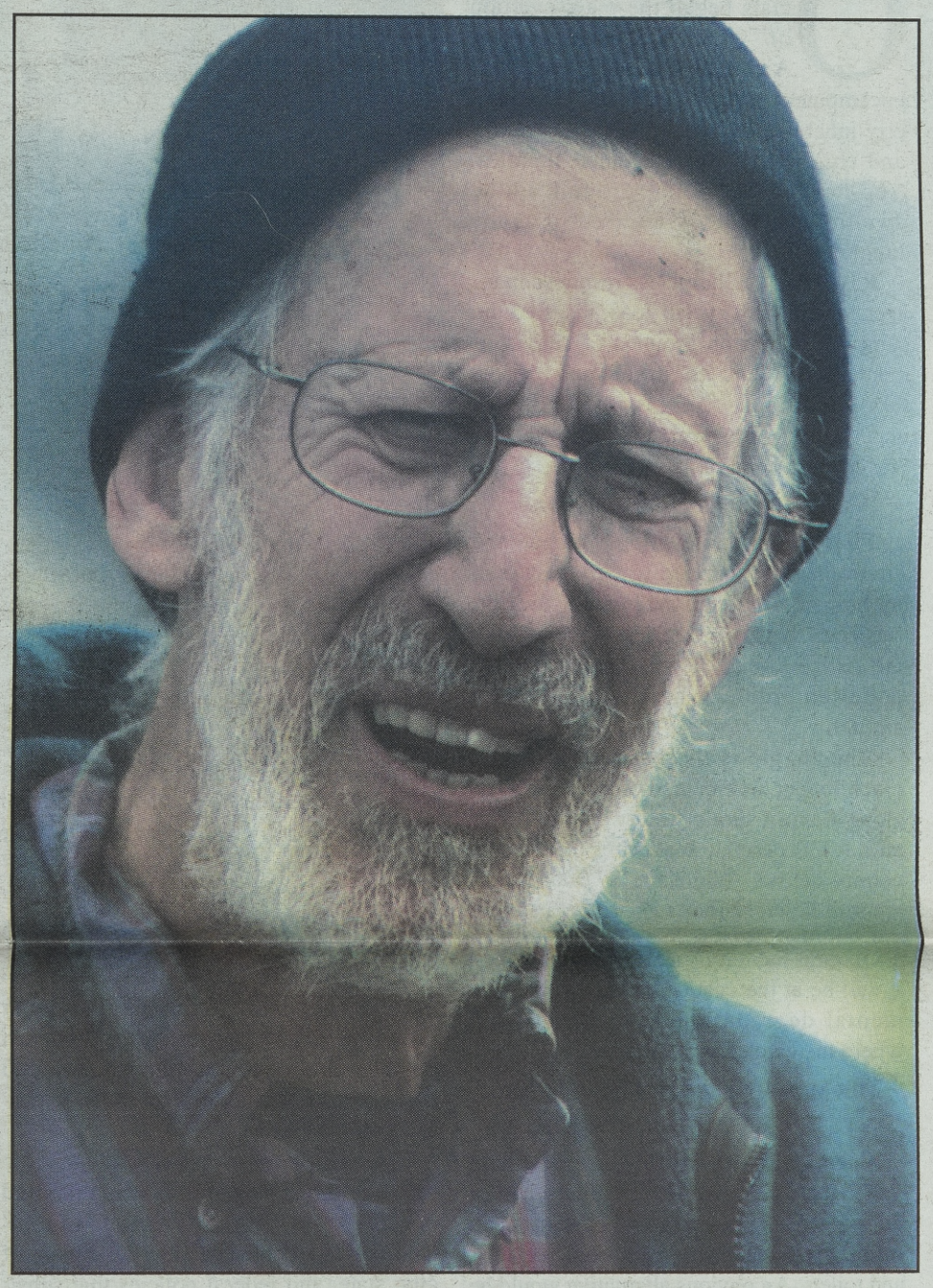
Call to mind all the racist images of people whose skin color tends towards black. Now think of the public image of people who are homeless: dirty, smelly, unkempt, lazy.

The targets of prejudice are invariably dirty. Dirt is a sign of moral degeneracy. It is unhealthy and it's ugly. Like excrement. If it's in the street, it needs to be cleaned up. Then the street will be beautiful again. Metaphors of cleansing abound where prejudice attempts to rid itself of those who offend it.

Homeless people are constantly cited for what we call "quality of life" offenses: blocking the sidewalk, trespassing on church steps, lodging (whatever that means), remaining in the park after curfew, etc. etc. I'm in court right now to defend my clients against just such charges.

But I can't help feeling their underly-

See **Are Homeless People Beautiful** *page 8*



Osha Neumann, an artist and attorney who defends homeless people, has a new book out: *Doodling on the Titanic: the Making of Art in a World on the Brink.*

Silicon Valley's Brilliant Design: Homeless Families Evicted in the Winter Rain

Developers and Silicon Valley billionaires are so busy trying to milk profits out of our communities they don't see the inevitable result of ignoring people's housing needs: *Families in the rain.*

by Carol Denney

About 300 residents of "the Jungle," a 68-acre camp near Coyote Creek in San Jose, were given notice on Monday, December 1, that they'd be arrested for trespassing if they didn't leave. Four days later, on Thursday, December 4, city crews and police evicted the remaining people and tossed whatever personal belongings they couldn't carry into the trash.

On Monday, the residents of the Jungle still had shelter, often tents or makeshift shelters built of anything handy. By Thursday, they had nowhere to go.

San Jose officials were proud of having "housed" 144 camp residents and handed out vouchers to another 55. Vouchers for non-existent housing are nothing new to residents of the Jungle. That's exactly how some of the encampment's residents ended up camping there in the first place.

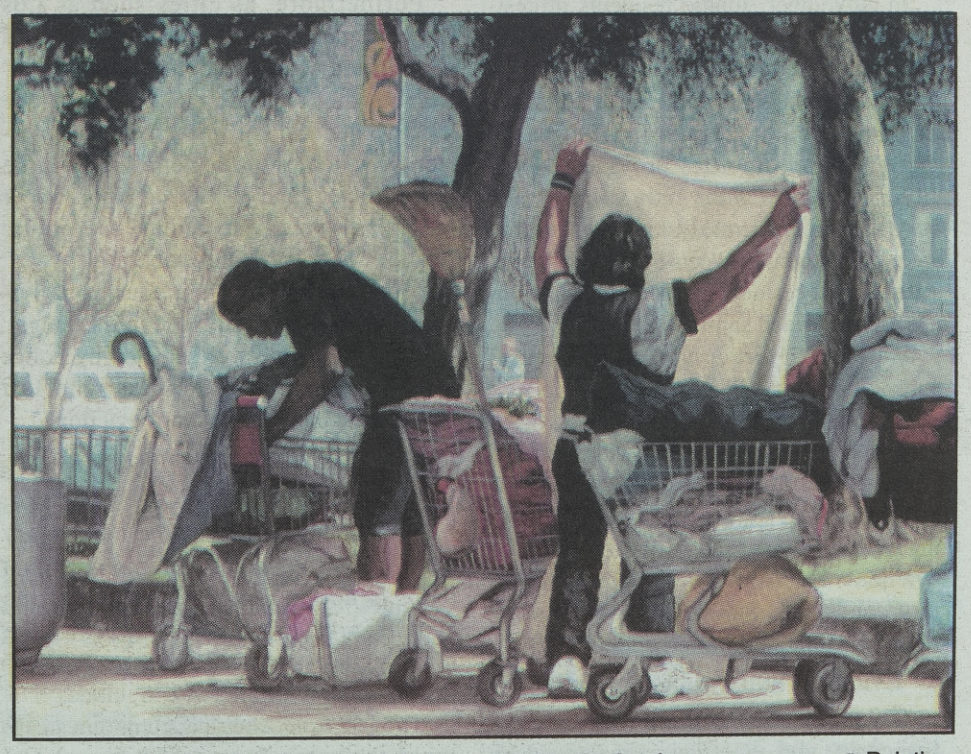
It's easy for most of us to see through a dumb idea, such as a canoe made of cotton balls, a lead balloon, or perhaps the comedy of the self-driving car. But, somehow, the dumb idea of forcing homeless people to move from place to place — only to evict them once again and drive them away on a never-ending march to nowhere — persists as a viable political option.

The eviction of the largest national collective camp of homeless people in the nation took place on December 4, just between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Hundreds of people had set up tents, lean-tos, and even a tree house in the 68-acre Coyote Creek area in an effort to rest somewhere where the local police wouldn't make them move continuously from place to place. They had children, pets, small amenities, and some banded together in protective families.

It wasn't a safe place. Not for people, not for wildlife, not for the ecological health of the creekside, either. But for those now huddled in shopping center parking lots and back alleys with what lit-

See **Mass Evictions at the Jungle** *page 7*



San Jose evicted 300 homeless people from the Jungle, forcing them to pack up their tents and all their wordly possessions.

"Scavengers" Painting by Christine Hanlon

The Eviction of America's Largest Homeless Camp

It is important to remember that those living in the Jungle were not there "by choice," but because they had nowhere else to go.

by Chris Herring

On December 4, San Jose officials began the mass eviction of what has been called America's largest homeless encampment: 68 acres of creek-side property inhabited by some 300 men, women, and children residing in tents, shanties, tree-houses and underground adobe dwellings commonly referred to as the Jungle.

Ray Bramson, homeless response manager for the City of San Jose, justified the camp's eviction on grounds of "environmental risks," and its "unsafe and unsanitary conditions." Yet, it is difficult to understand how an eviction might relieve any of these conditions.

The Homeless Archipelago

First, the eviction will not mitigate the environmental damage to Coyote Creek by homeless habitation. Even if the city succeeds in preventing resettlement after the police sweep, it will not resolve the pollution problem, but merely move it around.

The Jungle is the largest camp in a much longer archipelago of 247 tent cities along Santa Clara's waterways that contain 1,230 people, according to a recent county census. While the $7,000 investment in an eight-foot steel fence and several boulders to seal the site may restore the natural habitat of the former campsite, it will be at the cost of increased environmental degradation further upstream where the evicted will relocate.

The mass eviction will exacerbate the unsanitary conditions

Second, the eviction will exacerbate rather than improve the unsanitary conditions faced by the evicted — pushing them further from clean water, recycling centers, and toilets. An obvious alternative would be for the city to provide access to toilets, clean water and trash disposal.

In November, Jungle residents protested for better sanitary provisions in an event eerily similar to those occurring in the favelas of Rio and slums of Mumbai, shouting "No Potty, No Peace" in front of the three port-a-potties provided by the city. Not only was the ratio of one toilet per 100 persons grossly inadequate, they were only open between 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. After hours, residents were encouraged to use city-provided sanitary bags.

When a United Nation's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights visited Sacramento's Tent City and discovered similar conditions, the city was found in blatant violation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, for denying access to safe water, and its policy of evictions. Far from a solution to unsanitary conditions, San Jose's evictions are likely in violation of international law.

Eviction endangers residents

Third, eviction will only increase the insecurity and violence experienced by the evicted. According to longtime Jungle resident Robert Aguirre, police officers and social workers had been sending people to the Jungle for years as a place where homeless people would find safety from citation and arrest.

From the interviews I've conducted with residents of 12 large encampments across the West Coast, the primary reason that homeless people "chose" to live in such congregate settings (as opposed to their limited alternatives) is the "safety in numbers" they find from persecution by police, the harassment and assaults of the housed who all too frequently exploit, rob, rape, or beat-up the unhoused, as well as attacks by other homeless people.

Yes, the Jungle was a violent and dangerous place. The sad reality is that it was likely safer than the places the evicted will be spending the coming nights.

Lack of shelter and housing

Fourth, San Jose officials refute the critiques leveled above by highlighting their "housing first approach" to eviction, noting the 144 Jungle residents who have been successfully housed with two-year rental subsidies, the 60 who have vouchers in hand, and the opening of 250 winter shelter beds. This incomplete excuse is *the fourth fallacy of the Jungle's eviction.*

The claim that the provision of the regularly scheduled 250 temporary shelter beds is an ample response to a permanent eviction in a city with more than 5,000 unsheltered individuals is an insult to citizen's intelligence.

The fact that 60 voucher holders, more than one-third of recipients, could not find housing even with government-guaranteed rent is an embarrassing indictment of city, state, and federal policies that subsidize wealthier homeowners at the expense of poorer renters.

Furthermore, as cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco move towards coordinated assessments to distribute limited housing to those most in need, one must wonder if San Jose's blanket-provision of vouchers to Jungle residents is the most efficient and just use of resources or merely a strategy to reduce the public relations bruising of the eviction.

Most importantly, the housing provisions did not cover all those in the Jungle. At least 50 people were evicted by police along with countless others who left beforehand in anticipation of eviction.

Mass homeless encampments are increasingly common in U.S.

As San Jose captures the momentary media, it's important to remember that there is nothing exceptional about the Jungle in its existence or its eviction. Mass homeless encampments are increasingly common fixtures of U.S. cities.

The last time America's tent cities captured the same degree of national and international media attention was in 2009, when they were vividly portrayed as creatures of the recession: re-born Hoovervilles for the laid-off and foreclosed. The headlines proliferated: "From Boom Times to Tent City" (MSNBC), "Tent Cities Arise and Spread in Recession's Grip" (*New York Times*), and "Economic Casualties Pile into Tent Cities" (*USA Today*).

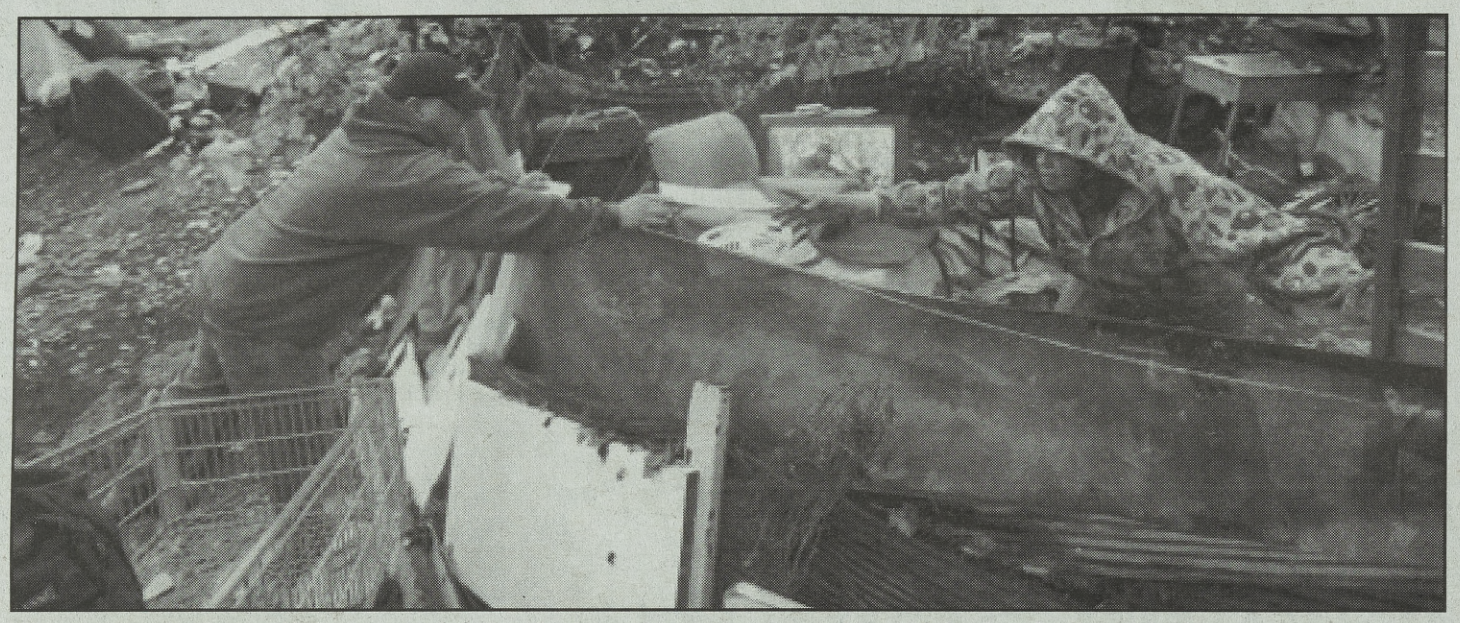
This time the headlines project a mirror image. With titles like "Struggling in the Shadow of Silicon Valley Wealth" (*USA Today*) and "Hanging out with the Tech have-nots" (*Mother Jones*), the Jungle was lodged in the heart of the venture-capital drenched Silicon Valley, 10 miles from the headquarters of the world's most profitable corporation, and was evicted just a day before the Labor Department announced that hiring growth is at its best pace since 1999.

While economic booms and busts drive the media's attention towards large encampments, encampments of this scale remain persistent.

As the media has a field day with its sensationalistic — nearly pornographic — stories focusing on the poverty of squalor in the midst of opulence that the United States is so prone to produce, it is important to remember that those living in the Jungle were not there "by choice," but because they had nowhere else to go.

Expelled from all other public spaces by the region's criminalization of the poor, they have now been pushed into more remote, dangerous, and unsanitary jungles along Coyote Creek.

Chris Herring is PhD Candidate of Sociology at University of California Berkeley and focuses on homelessness and urban policy. He is the primary author of the National Coalition on Homelessness report: "Tent Cities in America: A Pacific Coast Report." He can be reached at chrisherring.org.



A contractor in charge of cleanup (*at left*) hands a warning notice to a resident of the Jungle, the nation's largest homeless encampment. Hundreds of people were warned that they would be arrested for trespassing. Photo credit: Associated Press

Homeless people were forced to pack up all their belongings and leave the Jungle as the bulldozers arrived to demolish it. Photo credit: Squat!net http://en.squat.net

The Jungle was lodged in the heart of the venture-capital drenched Silicon Valley, 10 miles from the headquarters of the world's most profitable corporation.

For the Homeless in San Jose

by Joan Clair

Isn't there a city somewhere,
where people can live peacefully in tents
and not pay rent, and not be bent?
The light in the heart of a flower
shines more brilliantly than power.

god made visible

by Judy Joy Jones

can you really
put a soul in jail
for loving

does handcuffing
a 90 year old man
for feeding the poor
put his heart
behind bars

no i say
for to love
and be loved
is ours soul's purpose

bars are made
by man's fears

compassionate souls
such as he
are god's tender mercy
made visible
through our own hands

"Remember the Children Born on Our Streets"

by Lydia Gans

St. Mary's Center in Oakland held an annual memorial for homeless people on December 10, the International Day for Human Rights. It was an occasion to honor the memory of people who had died homeless on our city streets during the past year.

But more than that, it was a time to reaffirm a commitment to the fight for social change, and to grapple with the life-and-death problems homeless people have to deal with in their daily lives.

Executive Director Carol Johnson's welcome and the blessing by Rev. Donna Allen of New Revelation Community Church expressed the love and sense of community that St. Mary's offers to all the needy who come to its doors.

As part of the event, a special memorial was held in remembrance of Dave Ferguson, the executive director of the Open Door Mission, who died recently after serving poor and homeless people in Oakland for many years.

Frances Estrella, a longtime member of the community at St. Mary's, described the profound impact Dave Ferguson had on his life. Estrella said his life was in some disarray when he first came to the Open Door Mission, and his description of how he developed a relationship with Ferguson was full of humor.

He recalled their lively discussions of religion, with Estrella declaring himself an atheist and Ferguson never proselytizing or preaching. Rather than playing the solemn kind of music that is usual for memorials, Estrella took up his ukelele and led the audience in a lusty singing of "We Shall Gather by the River."

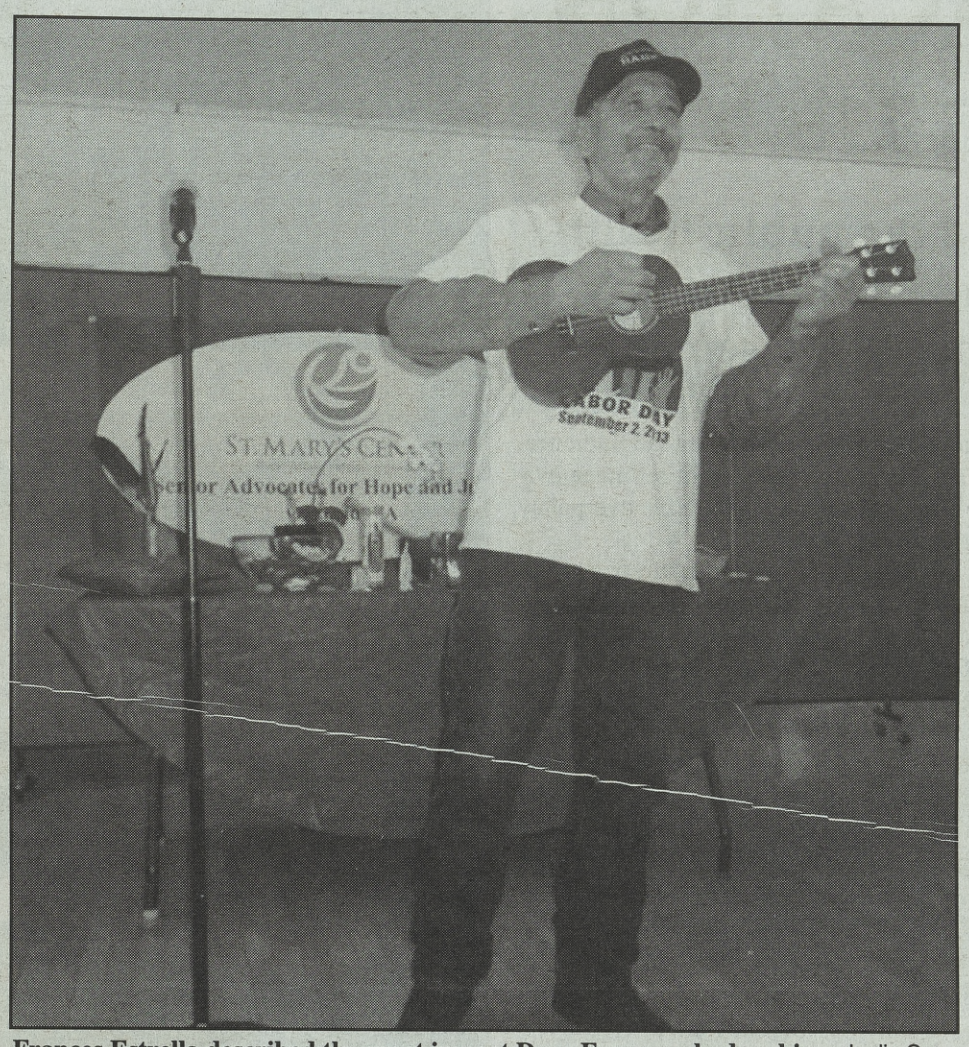
Shon Slaughter, who now succeeds Ferguson as executive director of the Open Door Mission, assured the audience that the spirit of the Mission is unchanged.

The main thrust of the memorial event focused on the crucial issues affecting the lives of poor people, culminating in Calls to Action to bring about change.

In weekly meetings throughout the year, St. Mary's Seniors for Hope and Justice become informed on the social problems that concern them and prepare to become advocates for change. They go out and speak at organizations, civic bodies and nonviolent demonstrations about hunger, affordable housing, social justice, and other key issues that concern them. Four Senior Advocates, Sharon Snell, Diana Davis, Guitar Whitfield and Judy Aguilar, each spoke about their advocacy and organizing.

Jonathan Lopez of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) discussed the Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign. WRAP is working with other social justice organizations to prevent criminalization of homeless people.

Lopez cited information gathered from surveys of homeless people in various parts of the country about their experiences with police and law enforcement agencies. In virtually every city surveyed, the overwhelming majority of homeless respondents reported being cited and arrested for sleeping, sitting or lying, or simply loitering or hanging out. Many were harassed by police or security guards just because they "looked homeless."



Frances Estrella described the great impact Dave Ferguson had on his life. He played his ukelele and sang, "We Shall Gather by the River." Lydia Gans photo

Lopez distributed a fact sheet with more detailed information on the surveys. He also issued a Call To Action by organizations and individuals in support of the Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign to pass Right to Rest legislation that will allow people to rest or sleep in public places or parked vehicles without being harassed.

Hunger was the other major social justice issue addressed at the event. Keisha Nzewi, advocacy manager at the Alameda County Community Food Bank, reported on the latest hunger study that found one in five Alameda County residents need help from the Food Bank and its member agencies to feed their families.

Even when families receive CalFresh (California's SNAP or food stamp program), for many people it is not enough to carry them through the entire month.

Nzewi talked about the Food Bank's campaign to undo the devastating cuts made by Congress in passing the farm bill last year. California now has the highest level of poverty in the United States. The recent cuts imposed by Congress are a terrible new burden for people throughout the state who are already struggling with a rising wave of poverty and hunger.

Nzewi explained that Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for seniors and people with disabilities come partly from the federal government and partly from the states. The first action in the campaign is to convince the governor and the legislature to increase California's portion of the SSI benefit by $100 a month for each recipient. This would lift a million people out of poverty.

The legislature will begin its budget hearings soon, so people are being urged to join the Food Bank in speaking up on what a difference that small amount of money would make in their lives. There is more money in the California budget this year than before, and it should be utilized to help millions of people living in poverty, rather than all going to the big corporations.

Closing remarks at the memorial were made by boona cheema, retired executive director of BOSS. Articulate and inspiring as always, she spoke of her feelings about the homeless people who have died. She said, "Deep down a flame was lit, and each time the flame got bigger and that flame was the flame of action. With each death I was moved to more action."

She recalled, "Ten years ago, there were some of us activists in a room saying we're so sick and tired of having to continuously feel the sense of hopelessness while holding hope in our hearts, and feel this anger while holding peace in our hearts, and we started to begin the conversation that became the Western Regional Advocacy Project."

She reminded the gathering that just as homeless people die on the streets every year, homeless children are born into poverty each year. She said, "Today I'm also going to remember the children that are born in our streets and take the little hands of those children and teach them to be warriors and have courage to rise from despair and feel the hope, the love, and the peace that's rightly theirs."

A basket of small stones was on a side table and people were invited to inscribe a name or message which would be placed in St. Mary's rock garden.

To learn more about Dave Ferguson's work at Open Door Mission, see "Dave Ferguson's Lifelong Mission of Opening Doors" by Lydia Gans on page 7 of this issue.

homeless person

by Judy Joy Jones

one day in time
the homeless person
waiting in line
for food
will be you

so don't close
ya heart to
ya brothers
dying in gutters

they are mirrors
of our soul's
own greed

Last Fragments from a Panhandler's Journal

by George Wynn

Forget the
word demoralized
if you want to
survive on Market Street.
Forget about where you
used to sleep
before you were broke.

Pray every day
your body doesn't
let you down
big time when
light turns to night
and you huddle
in cold desolation.

Never stop to ask
did you get what
you wanted
from this life?

Enjoy the simple
pleasures
the pen upon
paper brings you
and hopefully others.

Street Spirit

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GENTRIFICATION IS MAKING US SICK

Oakland activists and the public health department create a vision of healthy development without displacement.

by Zoë Levitt

The Alameda County Public Health Department has witnessed the health consequences of gentrification for years. As Oakland neighborhoods have become less affordable and housing resources have decreased, the health threats have increased for the county's most vulnerable residents.

Case managers in the health department's home-visiting programs have heard numerous stories of low-income clients being threatened with eviction if they complain about housing conditions that contribute to asthma and other health issues, as Amy Scholinbeck described in her testimony at the Oakland City Council on Oct. 14, 2014.

Many of our clients have been forced into areas where services are less accessible and still others have been pushed into homelessness — a devastating scenario for health.

Gentrification and displacement have also come up repeatedly in the work of Place Matters, a community-centered local policy initiative of the Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD). This initiative was built on the recognition that the places where we live *critically shape our health. Social* inequities drive health inequities, and policies and institutions are largely responsible for the vastly unequal conditions faced by people based on race, income, and geography.

Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson's office and ACPHD launched Alameda County Place Matters in 2006, at the invitation of the national Place Matters Initiative, now part of the National Collaborative for Health Equity.

Over the years, it has become clear that while Place Matters and our community partners were successfully engaging the issues of housing, land use, and transportation policy to improve health, gentrification was undermining those efforts by displacing longtime residents and preventing them from benefiting from neighborhood and city-level policy change.

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

When Causa Justa::Just Cause (CJJC) approached Place Matters in 2012 to work on a report about development without displacement, it was a perfect opportunity to deepen our understanding of the causes and consequences of gentrification as well as the role of public health in responding to the crisis.

Our organizations had built a strong partnership, starting with a joint effort to prevent water shut-offs in foreclosed homes in 2006 and leading to our ongoing work to improve tenant protections and code enforcement practices in Oakland. We also co-authored a report on the public health impacts of foreclosure in 2010.

Our extended partnership taught us what was possible when we pooled our different powers. CJJC has people power, organizing strategy, and a deep political analysis of the housing crisis developed through years of resident and community organizing on the ground. ACPHD can bring public health data, access to technical resources, and institutional credibility to reach and convene a broad audience. Together, we could build stronger evidence and advance more effective policy campaigns.

When CJJC released their report, *Development without Displacement: Resisting Gentrification in the Bay Area* last spring, a number of reporters focused on the public health angle of the story.

Through a year-long partnership between CJJC and Place Matters involving resident interviews, local data, and research, we learned that gentrification has serious impacts on the health and well-being of longtime residents of gentrifying neighborhoods, displaced individuals and families, and eventually, on our broader society.

IMPACTS OF GENTRIFICATION

Some of the impacts of gentrification in the East Bay include rising rents, economic hardships, evictions, foreclosures, displacement of black households, and a loss of social and economic supports that can save lives.

Rising rents cost elderly residents and people on fixed incomes over 50 percent of their income and force them into difficult budget trade-offs, such as paying for electricity but not heat. Gentrification can cause overcrowding, increase tenant harassment and eviction, and exacerbate discrimination in the housing market. It can also lead to closures of vital community-serving businesses and institutions.

Foreclosures combined with gentrification have deeply affected the wealth and well-being of the African-American community in Oakland. Between 1990 and 2011, Oakland's black population decreased from 43 percent to 26 percent, the largest drop by far of any group.

During the same period, more than 2,000 black households were displaced from North Oakland, while homeownership, a significant wealth-building opportunity, dropped and renters grew among the city's black population. Income and wealth are among the strongest determinants of health, as they enable access to multiple health-promoting resources and opportunities, which accumulate over generations.

DISPLACEMENT AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Displacement is financially burdensome and psychologically taxing, particularly on the poor and elderly. Moving at any age reduces social supports and increases stressors, but the longer one has lived in a neighborhood, the more likely one is to experience anxiety or depression after a move, hence elderly residents are at greatest risk of social isolation and depression due to displacement.

Displacement disrupts access to education, employment, health care, and healthy neighborhood amenities. Residents forced to move may face longer commutes to work or school, leading to increased stress, loss of income, job loss or greater school dropout rate. Displaced residents may have trouble obtaining medical records, prescriptions, and affordable health care services.

Displacement can also mean relocation to neighborhoods with fewer health-promoting resources, such as high-quality jobs, healthy food options, accessible public transit, and safe and walkable streets.

Displacement fractures the social and economic supports that can save lives. In CJJC's report, the case of the elderly resident saved from a diabetic coma by a neighbor who shared coffee with her on a daily basis is a clear example of the neighborhood relationships and rituals that are disrupted by displacement and critically important to health.

Displacement can also mean the loss of political voice, as residents lose their ability to shape the future of the city from the place where they socialize, work, or pray.

Gentrification is the latest in a string of urban policies causing "serial displacement" of communities of color through disinvestment and disruption. [See "Serial Forced Displacement in American Cities: 1916-2010" by M.T. Fullilove and R. Wallace, *Journal of Urban Health*, 2011.]

This repeated upheaval and dispossession in the name of development has profoundly undermined the support systems needed to survive and thrive and impacted health and well-being across generations.

Displacement also harms society as a whole by increasing metropolitan segregation and inequality, which contributes to poorer health outcomes for all. As urban residents are forced into neighborhoods with less accessible public transit, displacement may also increase driving and greenhouse gas emissions for the region.

PROFIT-DRIVEN GENTRIFICATION

In their report, CJJC points out that development is the investment of resources, services and infrastructure. This is something all neighborhoods and communities deserve, but for decades it has been denied to many areas based on the race and class of their residents.

Gentrification, by contrast, is the profit-driven transformation of working-class communities and communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment.

It's not inevitable, but a result of decades of government policy and practice, which give private developers and incoming affluent residents more resources and political voice than longtime residents, compounded by policy shifts that have massively eroded funding for affordable housing and diminished the ability of public institutions to protect and provide for our most vulnerable residents.

See **Gentrification and Public Health** *page 5*

"Seniors can't wait for housing." Photo credit: CJJC

Defining the Terms of the Struggle: Gentrification and Displacement

Gentrification is the profit-driven race and class remake of urban, working-class communities and communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment. This process is driven by private developers, landlords, businesses and corporations and supported by the state.

Displacement is the out-migration of low-income people and people of color from their existing homes and neighborhoods due to social, economic, physical, or environmental conditions that make their neighborhoods uninhabitable or unaffordable.

— Definitions from CJJC's report *Development without Displacement*.

Tenants' Rights Movement Wins New Law in Oakland

The Tenant Protection Ordinance is a landmark victory that will protect thousands of tenants from harassment by landlords. It was the first legislative protection for tenants' rights in Oakland in more than a decade.

by Robbie Clarke

On November 5, 2014, the Oakland City Council approved the Tenant Protection Ordinance (TPO), a landmark policy victory that will protect thousands of Oakland's tenants from landlord harassment.

The TPO resulted from the work that Causa Justa::Just Cause (CJJC) has been doing with the Alameda County Public Health Department's Place Matters program. It was a key policy solution highlighted in CJJC's *Development Without Displacement* report released earlier this year. [See http://www.cjjc.org/en/publications/report]

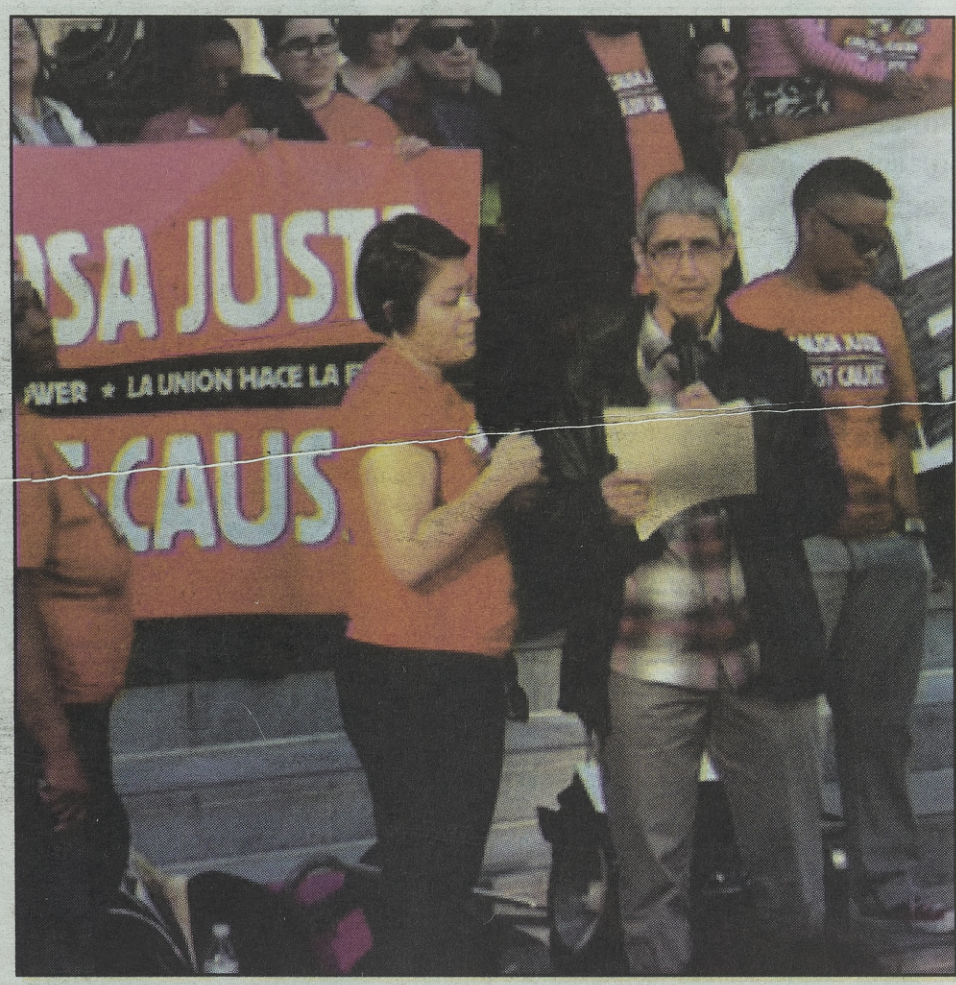
Dan Kalb, councilmember for District 1, sponsored the ordinance, which was approved by five out of eight councilmembers last November.

The TPO is a major win for the Bay Area tenants' rights movement and a critical step forward in ensuring that Oakland's longtime residents are not displaced by new development. It's part of a growing tenant justice movement, which includes establishing a rent cap and limiting rent increase pass-throughs for Oakland's tenants.

It was also the first tenant protection policy to be approved in Oakland in more than a decade. Previous protections, such as the rent stabilization program and just cause evictions, only applied to tenants in units built before 1983. The TPO extends to all rental units built up until 2014, with the exception of owner-occupied buildings and nonprofit-owned housing.

The TPO is also a win for immigrant rights and the fight for healthy housing conditions for all because it specifies 16 categories of harassment, including threatening to report tenants to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and refusing to make basic repairs deemed critical for the health of tenant families, seniors, and immigrants.

The TPO includes attorney fees for tenants forced to take landlords to court and obliges landlords to pay damages if found in violation of the ordinance. It also requires the City of Oakland to track tenant complaints across the board in order to accurately assess the scale of the issues faced by Oakland tenants.



Staff from the Alameda County Public Health Department speak out on the health impacts of displacement at a Tenant Justice Campaign rally outside Oakland City Hall. Photo credit: ACPHD

The fight for healthy housing for Oakland tenants is far from over, but the TPO is a good start. We will continue to demand that the city prioritize resources for enforcement of tenant rights and establish an administrative program to directly fine landlords who harass Oakland tenants and violate tenant protection laws.

Gentrification and Public Health

from page 4

In order to truly prevent gentrification and displacement, a new approach to development is needed, and public health departments have a role to play in this shift.

CREATING HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT

Public health departments have long worked in partnership with other public agencies to initiate neighborhood change in the name of health. While many of these changes have been positive, too often government-supported neighborhood change has excluded and displaced existing residents.

Public health departments have a history of involvement in destructive policies like Urban Renewal, which displaced thousands of black residents and businesses from urban centers in the name of "blight removal." [See "Public health, the APHA, and urban renewal," by R.P. Lopez, *American Journal of Public Health,* 2009.]

Our historic role in this racialized period of mass displacement demands that we make the prevention of displacement central to current work to build healthier communities — including partnerships between urban planners and public health to increase opportunities for physical activity, public transit access, healthy food access, and safe and walkable streets. Otherwise, these efforts may simply reproduce the unjust patterns of the past.

Dr. Muntu Davis, county health officer and director of ACPHD, said in an interview last summer: "Preventing displacement may be the single greatest challenge and the most important task in our efforts to create healthy communities for all."

There is much work to be done to bring about healthy development and public agencies cannot and should not do it alone. Community organizations, advocates, and residents throughout the Bay Area have advanced a powerful movement for development without displacement and secured a number of exciting victories in recent months.

CJJC and the Tenant Justice Campaign secured improvements to Oakland's rent regulations last spring, and more recently, won the adoption of the Tenant Protection Ordinance, which will protect thousands of tenants from landlord harassment, a common cause of displacement. Together, these represent the only legislative advances for tenants' rights in Oakland for over a decade.

Other promising actions underway include a community-based planning partnership to create "Healthy Development Guidelines" for Oakland — a joint effort between East Oakland Building Healthy Communities (under the leadership of Communities for a Better Environment, CJJC, East Bay Housing Organizations, and HOPE Collaborative), ACPHD, and the City of Oakland Planning Department, with technical assistance from ChangeLab Solutions. This multi-year resident engagement process will result in a tool that city planners can use to ensure that new developments meet community-identified priorities for health equity.

Many other exciting efforts are happening across the region. In both Contra Costa and San Mateo Counties, local health departments are raising displacement as a health issue, supporting anti-displacement community organizing, and providing policy and technical support to cities facing displacement pressure.

Public health departments and community organizations can and should strive to be allies in community-led struggles for development without displacement. To support these efforts, public health departments can provide public health data, research, and analysis to document the significance of displacement and the health consequences it brings. This means addressing all the reasons residents are forced to move — including lack of opportunity, habitability and affordability.

We can also provide testimony at public meetings and convene institutional and community partners to advance needed policy change such as tenant protections and affordable housing preservation, among other solutions.

Ultimately, our healthy development efforts should focus on ensuring that existing residents have the voice, opportunities, and resources they need to be healthy and thrive in the places and communities they already call home.

As Maria Poblet, executive director of CJJC, stated in "The Struggle for the Flatlands: How Oakland Can Fight Gentrification": "The struggle for stable, habitable homes needs to be a collective one; a people-powered process that shows us our power as creators of community instead of as consumers; a process that city officials accompany us in as allies of the people they represent; a process that builds grassroots institutions through which we build long-term progressive political power and grow in community with each other in the city we call home."

In this collective struggle, the task of public health departments is to see our role as allies of the people and use our institutional powers to protect health and well-being for all — including the right to stable, affordable, and healthy homes and neighborhoods.

This article first appeared in *Race, Poverty & the Environment,* published by Reimagine! Movements Making Media (http://reimaginerpe.org).

Zoë Levitt is the Local Policy Associate at the Place Matters Initiative of the Alameda County Public Health Department.

Special thanks to members and staff of Alameda County Public Health Department and staff and members of CJJC. Special thanks to Katherine Schaff, Tram Nguyen, Robbie Clark, Anna Lee, Kimi Watkins-Tartt, Dawn Phillips, Alex Desautels, and Will Dominie.

CJJC's report, *Development without Displacement,* is available at www.cjjc.org

For more information on Place Matters, see www.acphd.org/social-and-health-equity/policy-change/place-matters.aspx

The Destructive Impact of Gentrification

At a recent discussion hosted by CJJC and Place Matters, an Alameda County employee and lifelong Oakland resident illustrated the unhealthy and unjust consequences of gentrification with the following personal story.

As a young person growing up in West Oakland, he and his friends wrote repeatedly to City Hall requesting improvements to a park where they played basketball, but to no avail. It was only decades later that the City initiated major landscaping and improvements to that park — alongside the introduction of several market-rate housing developments, the influx of whiter, wealthier, and more politically connected residents, and rising rents.

When residents who have lived, worked, and contributed to their neighborhoods for decades in the face of disinvestment aren't able to stay and benefit from change, such development is neither healthy nor sustainable.

At a Baptist church in West Oakland recently, I learned that 60 to 70 percent of the congregants had been displaced to other cities around the Bay, which meant that they could not vote in their city of worship, even though many of them would have liked to support increasing Oakland's minimum wage.

New Vision of a 'Camp of Last Resort' in Santa Cruz

"We know that there's probably close to 3,500 men, women and children unsheltered in our community without a secure place to sleep at night."

— Rabbi Phil Posner

A homeless man sleeps on the sidewalk in Santa Cruz. Homeless advocates are proposing a "Camp of Last Resort" to provide a safe sleeping place for thousands of people who are unsheltered and forced to sleep outdoors in a city where it is illegal to do so.

by Steve Pleich

Advocates for people experiencing homelessness have long lobbied for the right of the unsheltered to a peaceful night's sleep in a safe environment. As Santa Cruz attorney and activist Ed Frey says, "The right to sleep is not only a human right and a constitutional right, it is essential to the physical and psychological well-being of every person, housed or not."

The recent effort to establish a safe sleeping space for homeless people in Santa Cruz is being led by Rabbi Phil Posner, whose son Micah Posner sits on the Santa Cruz City Council.

The vision of a "Camp of Last Resort" is founded on Rabbi Posner's belief that the right of every citizen to have a place to sleep is fundamental to our nation's concept of life, justice and the pursuit of happiness.

He says, "We know that there's probably close to 3,500 men, women and children unsheltered in our community at any given time without a secure place to sleep at night. The Camp of Last Resort is an opportunity to address this situation in a substantive, community-wide way."

Rabbi Posner explains, "In proposing this partial solution to homelessness in Santa Cruz, we appreciate that there are community programs that are successfully providing other forms of housing and shelter and see the idea of a public camp site as augmenting those important programs."

The camp proposal was created in response to the lack of more permanent housing for the homeless community in Santa Cruz. Supporters believe that a camp (or camps) of last resort will at least provide shelter for some of the thousands who are presently found illegally hunkering down on streets, trails or along the river.

Although Rabbi Posner freely admits that such a camp of last resort would not be perfectly safe or orderly, he is confident that it will provide a far healthier environment with less crime and violence then the unregulated and chaotic situation that presently exists.

Supporters of the program are seeking approval for a six-month pilot camp. They are calling for the City and County of Santa Cruz to designate one or more of the city parks, possibly a part of San Lorenzo Park, as a place where individuals may bed down for the night. The proposal further calls for the City and County to join together to support and fund this park project by providing large tarps or some other form of public shelter, along with access to bathroom facilities.

At the end of the trial period, representatives of the homeless community, camp organizers, and city and county officials would review the program and decide whether to terminate the camp or continue the project for a longer period of time.

The proposal holds out the promise of a safe haven for people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz, but also requires a degree of commitment and accountability on the part of participants.

Park sleepers would agree that the sleeping area would be limited to sleeping bags, blankets and personal belongings. Camping would be permitted only within set overnight hours. No tents or cooking equipment would be permitted.

This restriction aims to head off mainstream objections to an officially approved "tent city" which has long been an unresolved bone of contention between neighborhood groups, government officials and homeless advocates.

Rabbi Posner is realistic about how personal behavior will affect the success or failure of the proposed camp.

He says, "Each of our campers must understand that his or her personal behavior will impact the success of this Camp of Last Resort and it is essential that each person respect the rights of others who also use this park. The social interaction between park sleepers and other community members who use the parks will determine in large part the long-term success or failure of our idea."

Advocates for people experiencing homelessness believe that 2015 may finally bring some long-awaited progress on the issue of homeless rights.

With Warming Stations opening to provide warm, safe spaces on very cold nights, with Safe Spaces Recreational Vehicle and Sanctuary Village programs moving forward, and with the continuing work of the 180/2020 and Smart Solutions on Homelessness initiatives, this coming year holds great promise.

Perhaps longtime homeless advocate Linda Lemaster, the founder of Housing NOW Santa Cruz, says it best. "The new year is full of hope — hope that we can find a place in our community for people experiencing homelessness, and a place for them in our hearts as well."

Rabbi Posner and his supporters are currently gathering petition signatures in advance of a full presentation to city and county officials. Contact Rabbi Phil Posner at chatrabbi@aol.com.

An online petition also has been created: https://www.credomobilize.com/petitions/petition-to-establish-a-camp-of-last-resort

Steve Pleich is an advocate for the Santa Cruz Homeless Persons Advocacy Project.

Outside Our Window

by Claire J. Baker

We spot on a rain-stripped
eucalyptus trunk
colors we've never seen
before: shades of yellow,
gold, lime green, tan.

A homeless woman
stripped of an easy life
also reveals colors
when we pause long
enough to sense and see.

No Passport Needed

by Claire J. Baker

Come, let us join
the multitudes
on the journey
toward peace.

We, the people,
motley, memorable,
poised, unprepared,
gay, and not so happy,
handicapped and holy,

varying
yet all the same —
getting out of
our own way.

No tether, weather
or war shall deter
our journey,
our passage.

Peaceably we go,
peacefully we stay.

A Child's View of Winter

by Mary Rudge

(1)

The sun in through my window when I
wake up makes me feel warm and loved.
I like to wake up and see sky.
But the old, old window broke, we could
not afford glass or someone to fix it.
We have found board and cardboard,
and sealed up the window hole,
because it is winter and we will be cold.
When I wake in the morning and see
darkness, still I know
to feel warm in my heart, to feel loved
because my mother and brother
found cardboard and board.
If we find enough cans extra to pay,
we can have a glass window again.

(2)

In winter we only heat one room.
We hang blankets over the doors and
put all our bedding on the floor and
sleep there, together in one warm room.
I like to hear our breath
in the dark, one family
helping each other keep warm.

(3)

Today by the thrift store
we said a prayer before we went in
that the saleslady would try to find
something she could mark down
with just a few loose threads or tear
or spot, someone had given
for the poor to buy.
Today mother said
let us put in our mind's eye
the perfect sweater
with only a tiny unraveling
mother can fix
if we have enough money to buy.

(4)

My mother takes us to the library.
We love being warm.
All the colors of books,
words and pictures for free
are there for me,
bright light I can read in,
and the light in the mind.

In The Thrift Shop

by Joan Clair

Lady 1 carries a golden purse
and a dollar bill,
asks Lady 2,
"Will you pay for my purse?"

Lady 2 turns around,
flips open her coat,
a price tag shows.
"Can't pay for my own," she says.

"The truth is we all live
in an economic system
that is heartless." — Helen Keller

Dave Ferguson's Lifelong Mission of Opening Doors

The message for all who are hungry and homeless, and who need not just food and shelter, but love and support, is that Dave Ferguson's spirit continues to live.

by Lydia Gans

Dave Ferguson, the executive director of Open Door Mission in Oakland for 41 years, truly displayed a lifelong dedication — in every sense of those words — to his calling to be of service to the poorest of the poor.

Ferguson continued to work with the homeless and needy people who came to him for help right up until two weeks before his death from cancer at the age of 81 on August 31, 2014.

Ferguson made a very deep impression on the many people whose lives he touched. Shon Slaughter, the Open Door Mission's new executive director, said he first encountered Ferguson 14 years ago.

Slaughter recalls, "The first day I met him, I was on the edge of my seat — until the day he passed."

Slaughter became close friends with Ferguson and soon was involved in the work of the Mission. Ultimately, Ferguson spent his last six months intensively training Slaughter to take over.

When I attended the memorial event for homeless people held at St. Mary's Center on December 10, I was moved by their special tribute to Dave Ferguson. [See the article about St. Mary's memorial on page 3 of this issue.]

Shortly after attending that memorial, I met with Shon Slaughter in his office in Oakland to learn more about Ferguson's lifelong work. Slaughter explained that running the Open Door Mission involves managing a multiplicity of programs and services. The director helps poor people find housing, helps them manage their finances, and locates whatever basic services they may need.

Open Door also provides breakfast and dinner six days a week. Slaughter said that with Ferguson as the director of Open Door, "the meals were always hearty, always fresh, and he did all the shopping."

The Mission also offers mail and payee services, and Slaughter said that Ferguson took on that large workload all by himself. "At one time, he acted as payee for as many as 50 folks," said Slaughter. "That could be a fulltime job—plus. He did it all himself."

Slaughter said that Ferguson's passionate dedication was the thing that impressed him the most. "He was passionate about his work," Slaughter said. "He was punctual. His word was his bond. For 41 years, these doors opened at 6:25 p.m. at night and at 7 a.m."

Ferguson expected people to go out after the meal and take care of business, but he was available for counseling or help with practical issues if they needed him.

"He commanded respect because he gave respect," said Slaughter. "He ran a tight ship for people who needed structure in their lives.... They loved to come because they knew this would be a safe haven."

It involved far more than simply satisfying the physical needs of the people who came to Open Door Mission. Once asked to give a workshop on how he dealt with difficult clients, Ferguson hesitated, saying that it was not something that could simply be taught.

"It was always spirit driven," Slaughter said. "It wasn't specific. He explained that you have to have a relationship with people. You collect their mail, you feed them, you minister to them, you talk to them, you hug them, pray for them, love them. That's the relationship. It happens over time, it doesn't happen in one day."

For Dave Ferguson, the Open Door Mission was like a family. Often, people maintained a connection long after they stayed there. Rodney Bell first stayed at the Mission when he was homeless in 2004. Ferguson got him a job.

"It's heartening to know other people who are champions of the cause. Dave has been constant, like a rock, offering the welcome, free food — and basic human kindness to everyone." — Susan Werner, describing the lifelong mission of Dave Ferguson

In a recent interview, Bell said, "Dave's Open Door has been the calm after the storm in my life."

Bell is a talented piano player and after years of moving around, he reconnected with the Mission. Now, Bell plays music for the people when they come for their meals. The opportunity to enjoy live music together creates a sense of peace and community. You can look at it as "music therapy," Slaughter suggested.

It is customary in many missions to have someone give a mandatory talk before the meals. One of the first things that Ferguson did when he became director was to reduce the time given the speakers from an hour to 30 minutes and ultimately to 15 minutes. And no one is forced to come in and listen. Rather, they can come in for their meal when the talk is over.

I asked Slaughter how he would describe Ferguson. "I would describe him as a fatherly-looking man," he said. "Maybe 'Leave it to Beaver.' He always wore either short-sleeved or button-down shirts. Very clean-shaven. Not tall, five feet six or seven inches. Gentle-looking, that's the word."

Susan Werner, a social worker at St. Mary's Center who has been working with homeless seniors for 25 years, expressed her deep admiration for Ferguson. In her work with seniors, she knows of their appreciation and gratitude for the help and inspiration that Ferguson has given them.

"I'm grateful," she said, "for the work that he's done because it has uplifted people who I care about too."

She spoke of the importance of community, "how much he and I need community when working with people in need, people who are homeless."

"It's heartening to know other people who also are champions of the cause. Dave has been constant, like a rock, offering the welcome, free food — and basic human kindness to everyone."

Shon Slaughter pledges to carry on the work of the Open Door Mission. "We are a family here and I want that to continue and even flourish more."

Slaughter now talks about making changes and reaching out to other agencies, knowing that he had Ferguson's blessing. "It's just like he made changes, gave me the baton and said, 'Shon, you make the changes that you know that the Lord has laid in your heart.'"

The message for all those who are hungry and homeless, and who need not just food and shelter, but love and support, is that Dave Ferguson's spirit continues to live.

Mass Evictions at the Jungle

The Jungle wasn't a safe place — not for people, not for wildlife, not for the creekside ecology, either. But for those now huddled in shopping center parking lots and back alleys with what little they can carry, it was all they had.

from page 1

tle they can carry, it was all they had. The Jungle, as it was called, offered a measure of privacy, yet was near services, jobs, and housing prospects.

Coyote Creek is visible from the freeway, yet it is reminiscent of old San Jose, with native grasses, chaparral, sage, sycamore and oaks. Its historical tendency to flood made it a bad bet for otherwise lucrative development.

The creek still meanders freely, making it a diverse set of habitats long gone from many of San Jose's concrete, channeled creek beds. Concern about steelhead trout, among other native species, was cited as one reason for the eviction.

But there is no sane reason any ecological concern should be used to justify the wholesale eviction of people in need without supplying them with the obvious alternatives — "a public campground with clean water and sanitary facilities."

No story on this eviction, which was covered by the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, and many TV news broadcasts, neglected to marvel that the Jungle was a stone's throw from Silicon Valley's vaunted tech giants, among the most lucrative businesses on earth.

Apple's corporate headquarters is 50 acres. Their new campus will be a sprawling 176 acres. Silicon Valley's largest 150 tech companies began the year with $500 billion in cash reserves, according to the *San Jose Mercury News*, and played no small role in sending the average apartment rents to around $3,000, doubling from only two years ago.

Those of us who had friends at the recently evicted Albany Bulb know what comes next. Some people do find housing, or at least charity, and make their way off the streets. But the majority join a ragged caravan from place to place, hoping for respite by the train tracks or in a culvert that's not too wet.

Within ten days, San Jose rousted homeless evictees — people who had previously lived at the Coyote Creek area until the Jungle was dismantled — from Senter and Tully roads, taking their belongings and giving them mere minutes to move in what had become, after more than six inches of rain, the wettest December in 60 years.

Imagine taking all your clothes and blankets, all your books, all your musical instruments with you from place to place as you try to find someone to help or somewhere to go. It's a relentless lesson in detachment to watch your most important belongings end up in the trash, your papers tattered and covered in mold, your valuables stolen or lost, your artwork destroyed.

A mandated, free public campground in every city is not enough, of course. We need shelters, low-income housing, single room occupancy housing, serious statewide rent control, vacancy fees, a minimum wage hooked to inflation, a maximum wage for the bankers and CEOs who never seem to get so much as a hand slap when they steal billions, and an end to wasting valuable square footage needed to meet community housing needs on ubiquitous condos for the wealthy.

Most cities, including the state capitol in Sacramento, have public grounds around their city halls and libraries which ought to automatically convert to public campgrounds and shelters at obvious, measurable indices: the number of homeless people on the streets, a count which already exists, and the outstanding gap between the minimum wage and the average rent, another easily obtained number.

No politician has any business ignoring the obvious: that a full-time, minimum-wage worker cannot afford housing in the Bay Area.

Many of the people displaced in San Jose were born there and watched their hometown transformed into a playground for the rich. But this is a national story, as more and more cities find their planning and politics dominated by the power players, real estate interests, property owners, and developers.

Can you afford to take your local politician to lunch at the new, trendy restaurant and pick up the tab? Your local developer can.

These groups, just like Silicon Valley billionaires, have politicians' attention, but are so busy trying to milk profits out of our communities that they don't see the inevitable result of ignoring people's housing needs: Families in the rain.

On the same morning when a local radio station mentioned the latest report of 2,200 homeless children in San Francisco schools, the next program featured a tech enthusiast promoting little hand-held gadgets for classrooms as a panacea for learning — without acknowledging the fact that it's hard to learn at all when your family sleeps in a car.

Ordering people to traipse from one end of town to another makes as much sense as a self-driving car. When critics objected that the Jungle encampment needed assistance, not eviction, San Jose protested that they had spent $4 million over 18 months to help address housing needs.

It sounds impressive, but it doesn't take a fancy app to figure out that $4 million over 18 months divided between 7,600 homeless people breaks down to about $29 per person per month. The Downtown Berkeley Association spent fifty dollars a day hiring homeless people to work against their own civil rights on an anti-sitting law two years ago, money that came straight out of merchants' pockets by business improvement district mandate, whether they liked it or not.

We need public campgrounds now. It is the obvious response to the immoral and embarrassing reflex most cities have of pushing homeless people out of sight. If your local politician has to greet homeless families on City Hall's lawn on their way to work every day, it might help both short-term and long-term housing needs finally reach the top of the community agenda.

Are Homeless People Beautiful?

We all find sunsets and meadowlarks and fields of flowers beautiful, whether we are rich or poor, housed or homeless. How did beauty become a cudgel to beat people up?

from page 1

ing offense is that they violate society's sense of order — order not just as in "law and order," but an order that people perceive as attractive, comfortable, and ultimately beautiful.

The good, the true, and the beautiful are the triumvirate at whose feet we worship. The bad, the false, the ugly, are their opposite. How did homeless people end up on the wrong side of that great divide?

Women are tyrannized by concepts of beauty. They mutilate themselves with liposuction and Botox, and strenuous dieting to conform to an impossible ideal.

Homeless people are also tyrannized by a concept of beauty to which they will never be able to conform as long as they remain homeless.

I like to think of beauty as something everyone on the planet can appreciate. We all find sunsets and meadowlarks and fields of blooming flowers beautiful, whether we are rich or poor, housed or homeless.

Beauty is liberating. A joy. A relief from toils and troubles.

So how did it become a cudgel with which to beat people up?

The judge is late. Court was supposed to begin ten minutes ago. I start to scribble my thoughts on a yellow pad. Then I'm stopped by a thought.

I've been thinking of what *others* think about people who are homeless. How would homeless people answer the question, "Are Homeless People Beautiful?"

My guess is they'd find the question ridiculous. Their answer might be something like: "Well, Joe here is a beautiful guy, but Gus over there—he's ugly as sin." Or, "Maureen keeps her campsite nice and clean, but Davida's place is just a mess."

Then I think, well maybe the answer of the homeless would not be that different from that of the housed. Almost all homeless people would prefer to have a home. If they could be miraculously transported to one of those mansions in the hills with glorious views of the Bay — all clean and tidy, tastefully furnished, freshly painted on the inside and landscaped on the outside — would they not find their new surroundings beautiful, and their old campsites, by comparison, not so much?

Poverty *is* ugly.

Homelessness is a blight on a society as rich as ours. Why pretend that homelessness is beautiful?

Perhaps the only difference in point of view between those who use the concept of beauty to beat up on people who are homeless, and those of us who use it as a beacon pointing the way toward a better world awaiting, is the conclusion we draw from our observations, and the direction to which our moral compass points.

Once people who are homeless are not seen simply as "the other," but are seen as kin to us who are housed, then we housed ones will find in the houseless, the range of beauty, truth and goodness that resides in all of us. It just takes familiarity.

I really believe that. And I am comforted by this conclusion. It preserves my hope that all human beings can share in a common perception of the beautiful.

But it implies that universality can only be achieved if beauty can be extricated from all the moral judgments, contempt and disdain that infect it when it is applied to groups that we disparage. Perhaps inevitably, where we stand in the hierarchies of society — housed or houseless, rich or poor, comfortable or uncomfortable — will infect our judgments about the beautiful, and until those hierarchies are dismantled there will not be a universal concept of beauty that we can all share and which will not be a tyranny of one group over another.

Here's a case study in divergent perceptions of beauty:

In Albany, California, just up the road from Berkeley, people who are homeless lived for many years on an overgrown landfill amidst the fennel, the coyote bush, and the pampas grass. All manner of birds flew overhead and nested in the pines and palms, the acacia and the bay laurel. Lizards, ground squirrels, mice and rats scurried through the underbrush and clambered over the rubble. Trails meandered to hidden campsites, dead-ended at cliffs and wound down to the waterfront where, for many years, my son-in-law and I made sculptures of the scrap wood and metal which the landfill supplied in abundance.

I loved the place. I found it beautiful. And I wasn't alone. A whole host of us from all walks of life, especially including the folks who made the landfill their home, loved its wild unruliness. We loved its welcoming anarchy. We loved that there was still a piece of land on the edge of the city, untamed, un-pruned and unplanned.

The powers that be hated everything we loved. Where we saw beauty, they saw ugly. The landfill didn't look the way a park is supposed to look. Bad things happened there. Drugs were consumed, dogs barked, sometimes angrily, and even bit people once in a while. Some of the campsites of the landfillians were unsightly piles of refuse and garbage.

At council meetings, the elected representatives of the citizens of Albany sat on the dais, rigid and uncomfortable, when we came to beg them to leave the landfill as it was. Representatives of the local Sierra Club chapter lobbied furiously to kick the homeless out, claiming to speak for nature, but in fact speaking only for their preferred version of nature. The council members listened to them, for the Sierra Club was a great power in Albany.

And so the homeless for whom the landfill was home had to go. The place needed to be cleaned up. Tamed. Made beautiful. The powers that be mobilized the forces they had at their command — first police and lawyers, then maintenance crews and garbage collectors. With the big stick of citations for violating Albany's camping laws and the wilted carrot of a little cash for a few and empty promises of housing, they cleared the place out.

Now it sits empty, life-deprived, and sad, a shell ready to be bulldozed and wrestled into the form of a proper park.

The "stakeholders" in Albany detested what we saw as beautiful. We detest the prim, proper, tamed, shorn and shackled, unwelcoming and un-nurturing nature they admire.

Conclusions? I have only more questions.

In art, there is no such thing as ugly subject matter; there are only ugly paintings. There are beautiful paintings of the deformed and wretched, the broken and disabled, and there are ugly paintings of the muscular and symmetrical, the young, the toned and curvaceous. Is that observation even relevant?

Can we extricate our idea of beauty from moral judgments? Is that even something we should do?

Oops. No time for answers, even if I had them. Got to put my yellow pad away. The judge is taking the bench.

Osha Neumann's cover art for his new book depicts an artist on the brink of oblivion, doodling on the deck of the Titanic while all the passengers are swept overboard.

Book Launch Party for *Doodling on the Titanic*
January 22, 7 p.m.
Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA)
1101 8th Street (near Harrison) in Berkeley

Selections from *Doodling on the Titanic*

by Osha Neumann

ON THE VALUE OF ART WHEN THE GOING GETS ROUGH

A condemned prisoner in the hours before his execution might write a poem, and would no doubt appreciate the pen and paper with which to do it, but he would certainly prefer a file to saw through the bars or a gun to shoot his way out of jail.

ON WHETHER ART TAKES SIDES WHEN ARMIES FIGHT

The sound of bugles leads armies into battle, but the beauty of a song rises above the conflict, and the same melody, with the words changed, can inspire either side. The truly great works of art, no matter how fervently they were painted against their times, no matter the scandal they once provoked, eventually are accepted into the fold, and take their place, like honored elders, in the hushed galleries of the museums of the world.

ON THE RELATION OF ART TO REVOLUTION

The revolutionary on the barricade fights to return the world to the people. She raises her fist and shouts: "You stole our lives, our health, our happiness. You stole the wealth wrung from the earth by our sweat and blood. The diamonds dug from your mines belong to us who work in their dark bowels. The wheat in your sunny fields belongs to us who planted it and reaped the harvest. You have sold the fruit of our labor and pocketed the profits. We want what's ours. We've come to take the world back." The artist also struggles to take back the world. Van Gogh struggles with the sunlight and the wheat to make it his, to appropriate it. He struggles alone, but if he succeeds, his victory belongs to all of us. His struggle is not with the bosses or the owners of the wheat field. The police will not be called when he leaves with his picture under his arm. He takes only the image, not the reality, only the hope, not its realization.

ON THE MAKING OF ART IN A WORLD ON THE BRINK

Art has always been the hope of the hopeless, the refuge of those without shelter, the joy of the bitterly sorrowful. Without hope, there can be no art; and without art, there can be no hope. When all hope is lost, we seek solace in a song. The mother whose child is dying in her arms will, in its last moments, croon a lullaby to sooth it toward sleep. And if we, as humanity, are killing our mother, we might as well croon a lullaby to ourselves, and rock ourselves in each other's arms, as we descend into the everlasting sleep of the human race.

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Doodling on the Titanic is available online from Amazon (if you can stand it) and Barnes and Nobles. It can be ordered by your local bookstore. Osha Neumann can be contacted at oshaneumann@gmail.com